

## **Artist Earns International Honor**

**by: Brian Paynter**

### **Watertown Public Opinion**

Watertown wildlife artist Joshua Spies exhibits his work every year during the Safari Club International Annual Hunters' Convention in Reno, Nev. But he didn't expect to receive its Conservation Artist of the Year for 2011 Recognition.

"I got nominated last year and that was pretty cool," he said before a recent ribbon cutting ceremony for his fine art gallery inside the Goss Opera House. "This year, they didn't even do an interview. They just said 'We'd like to congratulate you.'"

Spies feels honored that other SCI chapters around the world and members who are collectors appreciated his work enough to select him for the award.

"It was just something that I kind of hoped would happen," he said.

SCI President Larry Rudolph said Spies' artwork depicts "a stunning realness of Africa's wildlife" that nearly 22,000 convention attendees recognize each year.

"The SCI Foundation is extremely proud to recognize Joshua Spies as the Conservation Artist of the Year for 2011 and we look forward to his leopard-themed masterpiece contributing to the success of SCI Foundation's conservation programs," Rudolph said via e-mail.

As the final Conservation Artist of the Year, Spies will donate an original acrylic painting of a leopard perched on some rocks to complete the "African Big Five Game" series.

Spies describes his 36-inch by 52-inch painting-in-progress as a composite scene derived from many of his hunting trips. He typically snaps thousands of photographs of animals and landscapes. Spies found some images from about eight years ago that would work for this project.

"It's really early morning," he said about the setting. "Basically leopards and cats hunt all night so it's at the very end of his work day. He was up all night and now he's just going to rest in the sun and probably sleep all day long."

Spies' leopard painting will be auctioned Jan. 28 during the evening banquet at the Peppermill Hotel and Casino that's part of the annual SCI Annual Hunters' Convention in Reno. All of the auction proceeds are donated to the SCI Foundation conservation program. Giclee prints of the original painting are auctioned at chapter banquets to increase conservation funding.

Other Conservation Artist of the Year winners and their contributions to the "African Big Five Game" series were John Banovich of Butte, Mont., for an oil painting of a cape buffalo in 2007; Jan McGuire of the foothills of the Rockies in Colorado, for an acrylic painting of a pair of lions in 2008; Brian Jarvi of Cohasset, Minn., for an oil painting of two fighting bull elephants in 2009; and Kobus Moller of Rhodesia, African, for an oil painting of a white rhinoceros in 2010.

Nominees for Conservation Artist of the Year Program must be a renowned wildlife artist committed to international wildlife conservation, a SCI member and not a previous recipient of the recognition.

The Conservation Artist of the Year program has raised more than \$100,000 from auctioned originals. The money has funded and continues to fund wood bison restoration projects and African lion research studies and programs.